

## Minnesota's Linnaeus Arboretum at Gustavus Adolphus College

by Stephanie George

**A**N HOUR'S drive to the southwest of Minnesota's Twin Cities sits St. Peter, home to Linnaeus Arboretum at Gustavus Adolphus College. Since its founding in 1973, the arboretum has grown steadily and is now flourishing as both a horticultural haven and wildlife preserve. Its design mirrors the natural landscape of Minnesota, featuring the three major biomes of the state: conifer forest, deciduous forest, and prairie. It also includes several themed gardens and plant collections, giving visitors the chance to experience a harmonious blend of cultivated and wild



Right: Linnaeus Arboretum's director Scott Moeller leads a group of young visitors through Uhler Prairie. Above: A trail runs among native conifers typically found in northern Minnesota.

spaces. Over 100 different species of trees and shrubs from around the world thrive throughout the 130-acre property.

### DIVERSE LANDSCAPES

Named after 18th-century Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus—best known for formalizing the modern biological naming system known as binomial nomenclature—the arboretum honors the father of modern botany as well as the rich Swedish heritage at the college and



surrounding area. The arboretum's logo also features Linnaeus's favorite plant, twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*), native to both Sweden and Minnesota.

The **Melva Lind Interpretive Center** serves as a gateway between the arboretum and the rest of the college campus. Named for a former Gustavus dean and longtime professor, it houses the main

operations of the arboretum and is a popular setting for classes, educational displays, workshops, and other events.

From there, visitors can explore the various gardens, collections, and educational sites. These include the **Borgeson Family Cabin**, a mid-19th-century homestead built by Swedish immigrants, and the **Johnson Waterfall Garden**, a serene spot



Above: The Johnson Waterfall Garden features a reflecting pond. Top: The historic Borgeson Family Cabin was built by Swedish immigrants who settled in the area in the 19th century.

surrounded by shade trees. Those seeking further introspection will enjoy the **Natural Meditation Area**, inspired by Chinese design elements and *feng shui* concepts, or the **Meditation Gardens** with a Swedish stone labyrinth completed in 2013. The formal **Lind Rose Garden** displays cold hardy varieties, the **Thompson Herb Garden** contains plants with medicinal and culinary uses, and **Basset Orchard** showcases heritage fruit.

Several ponds and a wetland preserve provide wildlife habitat, as do two res-

toration prairies. The **Uhler Prairie**, started in 1988, is the smaller of the two at roughly five acres, and is mainly composed of native tallgrasses. The newer **Coneflower Prairie** is planted with more than 150 different species across 70 acres of former cropland.

"Visitors now have the opportunity to experience what the tallgrass prairie was like back in the days when herds of elk and bison roamed here," says the arboretum's director, Scott Moeller. "We don't have elk or bison—yet—but we do have

badgers, foxes, coyotes, countless species of birds, insects, and other wildlife," he adds.

### CONNECTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

A large part of the arboretum's mission of education, environmental stewardship, reflection, and recreation "is simply to get people outside so they can engage with nature," Moeller says. To facilitate this, the arboretum adheres to a policy of no gates, no fences, and no admission fees, keeping the space open and accessible year-round. The arboretum also hosts numerous events, such as bird walks, guided tours of the prairie areas, and lectures by members of the college faculty. Its annual spring egg hunt and Fall Festival—complete with hayrides, live animals, and crafts—always draw a crowd.

Linnaeus Arboretum provides a myriad of ways for visitors to develop and

### Additional Information

**Linnaeus Arboretum**, 800 W. College Avenue, St. Peter, MN, 56082. (507) 933-6181. [www.gustavus.edu/arboretum](http://www.gustavus.edu/arboretum).

- Hours: Daylight hours, year-round. Interpretive Center open 8:30 a.m.–noon.
- Admission: Free and open to the public.
- Linnaeus Arboretum participates in the American Horticultural Society Reciprocal Admissions Program. AHS members showing a current AHS membership card receive discounts on educational programs and events.

Other nearby sites to explore:  
**Aspelund Peony Gardens**, Kenyon, MN. [www.aspelundpeonygardens.com](http://www.aspelundpeonygardens.com).  
**Como Park Zoo & Conservatory**, St. Paul, MN. [www.comozooconservatory.org](http://www.comozooconservatory.org).  
**Minnesota Landscape Arboretum**, Chaska, MN. [www.arboretum.umn.edu](http://www.arboretum.umn.edu).

sustain meaningful connections to the natural world. "If you ask 100 different people how they like to use the arboretum," Moeller says, "you'll get 101 different answers." As the arboretum continues to grow over the years, so will the number of answers.

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